



# COVID-19 Videoconference

September 30, 2020

The National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE) is a family of 11 Component and 3 affiliate unions. Taken together, we are one of the largest unions in Canada. Most of our 390,000 members work to deliver public services of every kind to the citizens of their home provinces. We also have a large and growing number of members who work for private businesses.

Larry Brown, President

Bert Blundon, Secretary-Treasurer

**COVID-19 NUPGE Components Conference Call**  
**September 30, 2020**  
**Noon – Eastern Time**

**PARTICIPANTS**

<b>HSAA</b>	Trudy Thomson Mike Parker Jerry Toews
<b>HSAS</b>	Karen Wasylenko Angela Barsalou
<b>MGEU</b>	Michelle Gawronsky Charlotte McWilliams
<b>OPSEU</b>	Smokey Thomas
<b>NSGEU</b>	Lynette Johnson
<b>PEI UPSE</b>	Karen Jackson
<b>NAPE</b>	Trevor King
<b>NUPGE</b>	Larry Brown, President Bert Blundon, Secretary-Treasurer Len Bush, Managing Director (Office of the President) Anil Naidoo, National Representative Deborah Duffy, National Representative Nadia Ibrahim, Research Officer

## 1. Opening Remarks – Larry Brown

NUPGE President, Larry Brown, opened the meeting by giving an overview of key issues of concern.

Brother Brown noted an election campaign is underway in BC. In New Brunswick, the recent election saw the installation of a majority Conservative government, which is concerning.

The COVID-19 infections are surging, and this is broadly being considered the second wave. In Ontario, the second wave is expected to peak in October.

The economy rebounded in August, but this is likely to be short-lived, and many sectors are still hurting, noting hospitality, and airlines.

The ruling released in the Cambie constitutional case was a significant victory. It will likely be appealed, but it is important to note that no new evidence can be submitted going forward.

Brother Brown outlined some of NUPGE's work and priorities.

Given the long-standing dangers of provincial austerity, it is likely some governments will use COVID-19 as an excuse to attack public services. NUPGE is working with the CCPA to do a province-by-province analysis on provincial responses to COVID-19 as well as provide an overview of what a good economic response looks like. Also, intervention in the federal budget is necessary to ensure needed investments at all levels of government.

NUPGE engaged research on aspects of the shift to working from home resulting from the pandemic. The paper is called *Workers' Health and Safety Protections and Working from Home*, and looks at the differences across Canada in terms of health and safety protections afforded workers. This paper will be presented at the upcoming Collective Bargaining Advisory Committee meeting.

NUPGE continues to advocate that long-term care be brought under the Canada Health Act. Childcare is also getting more attention because of COVID-19 as advocates continue to press for a national program.

The movement against systemic racism is growing and there are questions regarding employer obligations. There is a need for further exploration of this question and what is possible.

The reality of virtual conventions is upon us and we also need to look at how to ensure safe, pre-convention meetings, which are the foundation for a successful convention.

Another area which NUPGE has researched is on the issue of domestic violence. A paper was produced, *Domestic Violence and the Workplace: How Non-Canadian Jurisdictions Have Implemented Workplace Protections for Victims of Domestic Violence*. This paper outlines international comparisons and allows us to consider best practices as look to enhance our own protections in Canada.

The opioid crisis continues unabated in the midst of COVID-19. Mental health and addictions issues are concerning, and the rise in opioid related deaths needs more attention and action.

In Alberta, there are two main pieces of legislation which are concerning. There are many other initiatives by the Kenney government which are also worrying, but Bills 30 and 32 take direct aim at health care and workers' rights.

## **2. Roundtable Updates**

### **HSAS**

There is an election coming in October and a Saskatchewan Party reelection seems very likely.

On COVID-19, there have been outbreaks and infections in high schools, regional health centres, and in an RCMP detachment.

We are seeing the number of COVID-19 cases rise and expect the infection rates to rise.

There is a LOU in place related to COVID-19, but the Saskatchewan Association of Health Organizations is pushing for changes which would undermine workers' rights longer term.

HSAS has ratified a new contract through to March 2024 with rates of 0's for the first 2 years, followed by another 2 years of 1% increases, and a final year with a 2% increase. HSAS was happy to reach the agreement before the election. The link to the tentative agreement can be found at the link below.

<https://www.hsas.ca/collective-agreements/tentative-agreement-between-hsas-saho-april-1-2018-march-31-2024>

### **NSGEU/NUPGE**

The COVID-19 case numbers have been low in Nova Scotia, and the Atlantic bubble seems to be working.

There has been a negative impact on tourism in the province, and it is unclear if businesses can recover as restrictions continue.

A number of civil servants and workers in the university sector are doing their jobs remotely. While public schools have reopened, there are many issues ranging from a lack of planning, to protocols not being followed. Some universities have opened in-person classes.

There have been some fines for people who are not isolating, or for exceeding gathering limit sizes. Mandatory masking has been implemented in public spaces where distancing not possible. There has been positive compliance with the rules.

The Northwood report released on the outbreak in long-term care. The report is confidential and anyone who spoke to the committee cannot speak publicly. NSGEU declined participation and has written their own report. The actions the government has announced are soft and do not go far enough. The government is preparing a unit in Halifax hospital to be another COVID-19 unit, and we suspect it is so they can move long-term care patients into hospitals.

### **PEI UPSE/NUPGE**

As with other Atlantic bubble provinces, the case numbers have been low and there is no evidence of community transmission. The measures in place to protect the province have been quite strict.

PEI UPSE is currently in bargaining. Our biggest agreement is in the health care sector.

There have been negative impacts on tourism and as others have noted, the cruise industry has been hard hit.

PEI UPSE has 50% of its members working from home. Management surveyed whether people want to return to the office, and we are awaiting release of the results. Government had previously found that 71% of its members want to work from home, though more needs to be done to assess their preferences, as many want flexibility. The government is signaling working from home could be extended. Transportation minister said publicly that he would like 30% of civil service to continue working from home. PEI UPSE is having a meeting soon to discuss the issue further.

A 4-day work week was proposed in the spring, and PEI UPSE has been in conversation with the Green Party about their intentions. PEI UPSE has surveyed members on working a compressed work week so that we can be ready to speak to the members' views if the government decides to pursue this initiative.

In PEI, schools are open, and there have been no issues so far.

## **HSA/NUPGE**

HSA is maintaining non-mandatory office opening until 2021.

There is a plan for a member to member campaign in response to Bill 32.

Bill 30 is focused on moving a large number of surgeries into a private health care system. There are implications for health care nationally should this be implemented.

We have seen that Bill 32 has already created a chill effect on labour organizations. Some say they will not maintain payments to district labour councils and federations. Organizations like Friends of Medicare are feeling chilling effects on their funding. It is still unclear when regulations for Bill 32 will be tabled. HSA, and a labour coalition will each file their own lawsuits.

The pension bill has a coalition which is continuing with a lawsuit against the government.

On COVID-19, there are differing opinions regarding whether to close the province. There have been outbreaks in hospitals in Calgary and Edmonton.

There are questions around sick time, and how COVID-19 public health measures impact members. For example, for workers working who worked half time in 2 sites, but cannot work in one of the sites now due to COVID-19, how does this impact their sick time and how are they compensated?

What does the speech from the throne and potential new relief programs do to address this situation around sick time?

This week we expect an RFP designed to privatize lab services in the province, but it is still unclear how many collection sites there will be. There was a lack of clarity around how much of the lab services work would be on the block to be privatized, but we know it won't include hospital-based acute care work or special testing, but everything else seems to be in jeopardy. The impact on individual members, as well as whole of pension plan, would be profound.

The province is moving forward on bringing EMS dispatch under Alberta Health Services, and mayors along with the NDP are upset. There is tension around the AFL position on this file.

It is also important that as more negotiations take place on increasing federal funds transfers to deal with COVID-19, we continue to demand strings are attached to ensure provincial governments must use the funds as intended.

## **OPSEU/NUPGE**

OPSEU held a telephone town hall on anti-racism, and has an ad hoc committee developing recommendations as well as further actions. OPSEU is also engaging with government ministries on this file.

On COVID-19, the government says PPE supply is currently secure. The case load is rising with most of the increase concentrated in Toronto, Ottawa, and Peel region. There have been ongoing problems with gatherings.

Schools have reopened, and though there are issues, it has not been as bad as it could have been.

Our members conduct long-term care inspections, and there is a perception that management is mostly from industry and is focused on protecting the industry over people. There are also concerns with the minister in charge of this file.

The government's Bill 195 allows an overriding of provisions of collective agreements. For example, filing grievances, redeployment, and scheduling. This has caused issues in some hospitals. Unions are submitting a charter challenge, but OPSEU lawyer says there is no evidence to support such a challenge. OPSEU has not decided on our involvement in the challenge.

Directive 5 on the use of PPE has once again brought up the debate around aerosol spread of the virus. The labour movement is relying on research from CUPE. A judicial review has been filed by a few unions. OPSEU has not filed but was asked by mediator to join in a session, and unions wanted OPSEU involved so OPSEU joined the session. It is unclear where this process will lead.

OPSEU office remains closed. There is an order that regional offices remain closed as well as membership centers. Meetings are to be held by Zoom. Should an in-person meeting be required, head office will pay for a hotel room. Head office is open on a very limited basis.

The government said it wants 1/3 of the workforce back working in the office by the end of year. We were told this morning that the return to work plan is still in place, but implementation has been delayed.

570 OPSEU members have contracted COVID-19. Developmental services and group homes are the sector with the highest rates. Hospital workers are next highest in terms of infections, followed by the LCBO.

There are no plans for mass layoffs, but we are expecting more layoffs in post-secondary education.



The convention committee is planning for regional meetings in March, with the convention planned for May 2021. The committee is also looking at alternatives related to the convention, online voting, etc.

Overall, the messaging is confusing within Ontario and across the country. There are lots of competing interests and views around closures.

OPSEU membership has done well related to COVID-19 with health and safety committees working well.

Related to the crisis in long-term care, the worst outbreaks are in private, for-profit facilities. The government has commissioned a report on the outbreak, and there are calls for a public inquiry. OPSEU submitted a paper to the government on state of the sector along with recommendations.

During the pandemic, our emphasis has been on OPSEU as non-partisan and representing the members.

The COVID-19 second wave is threatening to repeat the problems we had in our hospitals. We are again seeing many patients being discharged, to build in surge capacity with elective surgeries being cancelled. There were previously lots of cases of ICUs and CCUs being overwhelmed because of outbreaks. Things settled a bit over the summer, but admissions are again going up, and we are again seeing some outbreaks. Members are putting in lots of overtime and their vacation time is being denied. Employers are also not filling positions which is adding to workloads.

Access to PPE remains an issue in hospitals. All work refusals based on lack of proper protective equipment have been denied. Directive 5 was a 'win', and said that health care workers could do a point of care assessment, and decide the level of PPE required based on the assessment. This only happened because workers have continued to fight for better PPE.

For COVID-19 testing, hospitals and assessment clinics have ramped up to meet the demand, but they have not been given additional funding from the government. Hospitals are meeting the increased testing needs from within existing budgets, with some spending \$1-2 million per month on COVID-19 testing. This is not sustainable, and the government's plan to expand testing to pharmacies has raised concerns.

## **MGEU/NUPGE**

Cases are rising in personal care, acute care, and schools. Most deaths are associated with personal care facilities.

Winnipeg and surrounding municipalities have moved to Code Orange. Mask use is now mandatory when interacting in public, and there is a gathering limit of 10 people, except for workplaces. They have designated union meetings as social gatherings.

In Brandon, the community testing site was closed and moved to the college, next to a daycare. MGEU has written to the minister about this change. The government is also looking to offer testing in pharmacies.

The province announced a balanced budget, but the long term impacts of COVID-19 will be a problem going forward.

Trying to open bargaining with Crown corporations. MGEU is hearing that the finance minister has said they are only entertaining 2-year agreements.

Manitoba Public Insurance gave a rebate during COVID-19. Public utility board is now calling for a 10% cut to MPI premiums, which will impact revenue.

Also dealing with the ongoing privatization in the highways sector. The City of Winnipeg will be pushing the Premier to move to a provincial system for EMS. Our public medical labs are being closed and privatized. Dynacare is now increasingly providing lab work for the province.

MGEU convention will likely be postponed.

The crisis in long-term care exposed that outcomes were worse in the private sector than in public facilities. The province is using private surgical companies to address the backlog of surgeries, not expanding the public capacity.

Two Cancer Care sites in Winnipeg are closing, and we are anticipating a move towards privatization. In mental health, the government is also opening the door to privatization.

The health order that restricts staff to one long-term care facility has been extended to March 31, 2021. We are seeing that private agencies, who are supplying staff, do not have to follow the same rules, and this is a concern.

## **NAPE/NUPGE**

Provincial budget was just released. It seems to be an election budget and is projecting an increased debt.

Tomorrow the provincial minimum wage increases to \$12.15 an hour with another \$0.25 to be added in April 2021.

COVID-19 cases remain low, and some rules and restrictions have relaxed, but masks remain mandatory in public.

Schools are open, so far so good with 85% attendance.

The courts have upheld the provincial travel restrictions, but did allow people who own property to enter the province.

In long-term care, the single site order has been lifted. NAPE initially supported this order for health reasons, but part-time workers were losing hours, and were not eligible for supports. There continues to be a staffing shortage and increased burnout. Many staff are leaving the sector.

NAPE recently held an in-person board meeting with social-distancing. This worked well. In October, NAPE will be starting virtual town hall meetings. This will be a trial.

NAPE's office is open, though still not open to members. There are some exceptions being made for small groups.

### **3. Next Steps**

It was determined that there is interest in having these meetings move to once a month.



## NATIONAL UNION OF PUBLIC AND GENERAL EMPLOYEES

- B. C. Government and Service Employees' Union (BCGEU)
- Health Sciences Association of British Columbia (HSABC)
- Health Sciences Association of Alberta (HSAA)
- Saskatchewan Government and General Employees' Union (SGEU)
- Manitoba Government and General Employees' Union (MGEU)
- Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU)
- Canadian Union of Brewery and General Workers (CUBGW)
- New Brunswick Union of Public and Private Employees (NBU)
- Nova Scotia Government and General Employees Union (NSGEU)
- PEI Union of Public Sector Employees (PEI UPSE)
- Newfoundland & Labrador Association of Public and Private Employees (NAPE)

The National Union of Public and General Employees is an affiliate of the Canadian Labour Congress and a member of Public Services International.

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